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JUNE RAMBLES IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.

BY E. L. GREENE.

IN the latitude of central Colorado, there is not a more charming season for botanizing among the lower mountains, than the first of June. The snow-drifts which lingered so long in many places have now entirely disappeared; and the few impatient flowers that came out in defiance of April's frosts and chilly winds, have given place to an almost innumerable host of others. The pines and spruces are sending out their fragrant shoots with tender foliage, and a number of most beautiful deciduous shrubs are in their perfection of flower and leaf. In passing among the foot-hills, toward the mountains, one cannot fail to notice the abundance of Leguminous plants. Our flora is peculiarly rich in them. The *Oxytropis Lamberti* is one of the most showy, and is also exceedingly variable in size, as well as in the color of the flowers. On the high plains of the Platte, the scapes are only a few inches high, and the corollas of the richest purple. We meet it again, at the base of the mountains, a foot high, bearing yellowish white blossoms. These varieties appear so remarkably different, that we might well regard them as distinct species, but that among the higher mountains we find many intermediate forms. The closely allied genus *Astragalus* is represented by not less than ten or twelve species. None of these call to mind the common eastern one (*A. Canadensis*) with its tall stem and homely greenish blossoms, but most of them are low-stemmed, with flowers large, and more or less gaily colored. *A. caryocarpus*, a very common plant, has white and purple flowers, which are succeeded by large round pods. These, lying upon the ground under the intense rays of the summer sun, assume a fine purple tinge, which gives them the appearance of grapes or plums, hence the plant is commonly called Ground Plum. *A. Missouriensis* and *A. Parryi* are beautiful plants; the former, with deep purple, and the latter, with white flowers. The legumes of both species are thick and fleshy, and lying on the ground, are curved upwards. Other fine *Astragali* ought to be mentioned here, as well as plants of other genera, but we must hasten to the mountains.

We desire the reader, whether he be a botanist, or a lover of scenery, to accompany us for a few miles up the cañon of Clear Creek; assuring him at the outset that if he has any due appreciation of any of these things he will not regret, in after days, a few hours' toil among the picturesque wilds of this grand gateway to the higher mountains.

Following the stream for the distance of half a mile above Golden City, we quite suddenly find ourselves shut in on either side by a rocky wall of prodigious height, and either so nearly perpendicular, that to ascend would be impossible, at least in many places. In most hilly and mountainous countries, rivers have their valleys. Not so here; for since the mountains are almost solid masses of rock, the waters, during the lapse of ages, have worn out for themselves, narrow and deep gorges or cañons instead of broad valleys.

On the north side of the stream, there is left sufficient space for a narrow wagon road, and along this sort of terrace we pursue our way. At this season of the year, swollen by the rapid melting of snow in the higher altitudes, Clear Creek is a torrent; and as it comes boiling down over the rocks and forcing its passage through narrow defiles, it seems to jar the foundations of the very mountains. The constant roar drowns all the voices of the hundreds of song-birds that occupy the trees and shrubs which grow among the rocks, and would be tiresome indeed, did we not forget our ears, while admiring with our eyes the manifold beauties of the scenery around and above us.

But at length we issue forth upon a broader pathway, and the mountain sides become less precipitous. We may now begin the work of filling our portfolios. In the more open situations, there grows among the rocks, a fine liliaceous plant, with a large, whitish, tulip-like flower, and narrow, grassy leaves. It is the *Lencocrinum montanum*. Three or four very ornamental shrubs, all with snow-white blossoms, are conspicuous along the water's edge, and under the shade of overhanging cliffs; a raspberry (*Rubus deliciosus*) with smooth stems and entire, roundish leaves, with solitary flowers as large as wild roses; a dwarf, and profusely flowering variety of *Spiræa opulifolia*; and more beautiful than either, the *Jamesia Americana*.

From almost every crevice in the rocks, *Campanula rotundifolia* hangs forth, on thread-like stems, her toneless bells of deepest

blue, and with this grows a very pretty yellow flowered *Senecio* which we cannot now name with certainty. We notice several kinds of wild currants among the more common shrubs. The one known in cultivation, as the Flowering Currant (*Ribes aureum*) and justly esteemed for its showy and fragrant yellow blossoms, is the only one in flower now, the others being earlier.

We have now come to a rude wooden bridge, apparently constructed some time ago, for the accommodation of some company of gold seekers; for, on the other side, are various indications that mining was once undertaken there, but with short-lived success. The mountains on either side are now gradually drawing very close to the creek, and it is evident that we cannot proceed longer up the stream, for want of a path. We cross the bridge. A deep ravine, shaded by tall spruces, and filled with a variety of underbrush, leads up the mountain at the left. We follow this ravine in the hope of finding yet other novelties. Having climbed up for some distance, over the lichen-clad rocks, and having scratched our hands to a painful extent, among wild gooseberry bushes, we reach at last a kind of broad terrace, where we find a delightful spring of water, whence a clear and laughing streamlet runs musically down to join the noisy flood below. Strawberry plants, and pale Canada violets are blooming abundantly along the streamlet, and among the bushes is a handsome composite with large yellow flowers on stems a foot high, the leaves clothed with soft woolly hairs. This proves to be *Arnica cordifolia*. But what is this little gem of a plant, growing all over the wet, mossy surfaces of the shelving rocks? The delicate stems are only two or three inches high, each supporting three or four pendulous flowers of a deep purple. A nearer view shows the flowers to be those of the shooting star (*Dodecatheon Meadia*). But how very different the whole plant seems from the specimens one sees on the borders of woods, east of the Mississippi, where they grow tenfold larger, and have white or rose-colored flowers. However, the proper authorities have pronounced the Rocky Mountain plant to be only a variety of the original *Dodecatheon Meadia*. Following the ravine, we gather, as we ascend, *Clematis alpina*, *Antennaria Carpathica*, and three specimens of the very rare and interesting *Ranunculus Nuttallii*.

In the midst of all this wildness of scenery, in an almost inaccessible solitude, where it might well be supposed no human

foot, not even of an Indian, had ever trod before us, we are surprised all at once to meet with a veritable log cabin. It stands under the spreading branches of a giant fir-tree, and covers an area just about large enough to furnish lodging room for two persons. From the earth floor to the flat roof of hewn timbers, the height is not more than six feet. A large fireplace has been dug in the bank immediately in front of the broad doorway. Such were doubtless the winter quarters of some hermit hunter and trapper.

Finally, we reach the comparative level of the mountain top, and find ourselves at once in a pleasant grove of stately pines. Several hours have passed since we left the bridge, and now we can only hear a soft deep breezy murmur from the torrent far below. The number of flowers has gradually diminished from the gay profusion of the lower part of the cañon, until on this cool and airy height, we find but a single species. It is *Erigeron compositum*, a pretty little alpine composite, with white, daisy-like flowers. We have not met it before, though here it is abundant.

But the day is fast declining, and we must seek refuge from the chill dews of approaching night. The monotonous din of a cow-bell assures us that we are not far from the haunts of men, so we may yet take a little time to admire the scenery of this new place. Passing from the pine woods we enter upon the most beautiful of pasture lands, where a numerous herd are grazing and slowly wending their way along what seems their homeward path. Little groves of birch and aspen scattered here and there, are rejoicing in their young and tender foliage, while amid their branches, a harmonious choir of robins warble their vespers.

But how shall pencil trace, or pen describe the glory of this sunset? A line of snowy peaks, canopied by clouds of purple tinged with gold, extends along the western sky, while southward, all seems an undulating sea of rich dark forest. The plains below are already darkening in the shadows of the mountains. To them the sun is set, and we must hasten to the nearest "ranch" and secure lodgings for the night.